FADRC

~~FOIA E-136~~

(1838)

December 13, 1978

Dear Mr. Stangeland:

The Secretary has asked me to thank you for your letter of December 6 in which you requested information about the U.S. response to the Guyana tragedy. As you know, the United States Government continues to be involved in this tragic episode and is investigating various aspects of the situation. Nevertheless, I wanted to give you an early response to the questions you have raised concerning this unprecedented matter.

On Sunday, November 19, it had become clear that the United States Government was facing a major crisis in Guyana. An American Congressman and other Americans in his party had been killed. A settlement believed to include over 1,000 Americans was involved, and its situation was uncertain. It was apparent that the Government of Guyana required assistance in handling a major emergency created by the presence of Americans within its borders.

The President, acting under his constitutional authority as Chief Executive and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, ordered the departments of our government to take action to deal with this emergency. The operational decisions within the U.S. Government in this unique situation were made by the Secretary of State in conjunction with some of his Cabinet colleagues.

Under the President's Executive authorities, medical evacuation for injured Americans was immediately ordered, and the United States Government offered assistance to the Government of Guyana to prevent further loss of life. As events progressed, it became clear that there were large numbers of Americans dead. For a time, it was believed that there were survivors in the jungle, and the United States adjusted and increased its assistance to help the search by Guyana police and military. Finally, when the full scope of the tragedy of Jonestown was clear, our Government was requested by the Government of Guyana to remove the bodies. This operation was considered essential in handling the emergency situation which existed in Guyana at the time.

The Honorable
Arlan Stangeland,
House of Representatives.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

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The Justice Department is fully exploring possible legal remedies which can be used to recover the cost the U.S. Government has incurred in removing and processing the bodies of Americans from Guyana. Now that the emergency is substantially over, the Office of Management and Budget and other agencies are reviewing the various operations to determine the exact cost to the United States Government. Although the costs to the United States Government of an effort of this magnitude obviously are considerable, they are substantially less than the $8 million figure used in some press reports. Please be assured that we will report fully to appropriate congressional committees on these aspects of the operation upon completion of our review. Meanwhile, the Justice Department will make all efforts to recover the costs to the U.S. Government.

If you have any further questions, you may wish to contact Deputy Assistant Secretary John Bushnell in our Bureau of Inter-American Affairs on 632-8562.

Sincerely,

OB/cw

Douglas J. Bennet, Jr.
Assistant Secretary
for Congressional Relations

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N STANGELAND
TH DISTRICT, MINNESOTA

COMMITTEES:
GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
PUBLIC WORKS AND
TRANSPORTATION

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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

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December 5, 1978

67 ACTION is assigned to ARA

The Honorable Cyrus R. Vance
Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20520

Dear Secretary Vance:

It is my understanding that the U. S. Government has spent between three and eight million dollars to return the bodies of the more than 900 victims of the Peoples Temple mass suicide and murders in Guyana. I also understand that the State Department is presently investigating methods of obtaining Peoples Temple's funds located in Guyana for the purpose of covering part of this cost and have sent legal staff to assist the United States Embassy in Guyana with a wide range of legal issues concerning this matter.

I strongly encourage the State Department to exhaust all possible methods to recover Peoples Temple's funds to cover these costs. At a time when government is trying to reduce spending and our citizens have strongly shown their desire to get government spending under control, especially in questionable expenditures such as this, it is very important that the government set an example by recovering funds from the Peoples Temple to pay for the expenses incurred.

Again, I strongly encourage that all efforts be made to recover Peoples Temple's funds and would appreciate being informed of your actions to accomplish this.

Thanking you in advance for your consideration and assistance, I am

Sincerely,

Arlan Stangeland

Arlan Stangeland
Member of Congress

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